

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF FLORIDA
MIAMI DIVISION

CASE NO.:

WINDY LUCIUS

Plaintiff,

v.

VIMA BEACH, LLC,
d/b/a Café del Mar

Defendant.

COMPLAINT FOR INJUNCTIVE RELIEF

Plaintiff, Windy Lucius (“Plaintiff”) sues Defendant, Vima Beach, LLC., (“Defendant”) doing business as Café del Mar, for Injunctive Relief, attorney’s fees, litigation expenses and costs under Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, as amended, 42 U.S.C. §§ 12181-12189 (“ADA”), 28 C.F.R. Part 36, et seq.

1. Venue lies in the Southern District of Florida pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1391(b) and Local Rule 3.1, in that the original transaction or occurrence giving rise to this cause of action occurred in this District.

2. Pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1331 and 28 U.S.C. § 1343, this Court has been given original jurisdiction over actions which arise from Defendant’s violations of Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act, 42 U.S.C. § 12181 *et seq.* See also 28 U.S.C. § 2201 and § 2202.

3. Plaintiff is a Florida resident, is *sui juris*, and qualifies as an individual with disabilities as defined by the ADA. Plaintiff is legally blind and a member of a protected class under the ADA, 42 U.S.C. §§ 12102(1)-(2), the regulations implementing the ADA set forth at 28 C.F.R. §§ 36.101 *et seq.* and in 42 U.S.C. 3602, §802(h). Plaintiff is substantially limited in the

**Lucius v. Vima Beach
Complaint for Injunctive Relief**

major life activity of seeing. Plaintiff's disability is defined in 28 C.F.R. §36.105(b)(2).

4. Plaintiff uses the internet and a mobile device to help her navigate a world of goods, products and services like the sighted. The internet, websites and mobile applications provide her with a window into the world that she would not otherwise have. She sues Defendant for offering and maintaining a mobile website (software that is intended to run on mobile devices such as phones or tablet computers) that is not fully accessible and independently usable by visually impaired consumers. Plaintiff uses the Apple Screen Reader VoiceOver software to read computer materials and/or access and comprehend internet mobile website information which is specifically designed for the visually impaired.

5. Plaintiff is also an advocate of the rights of similarly situated disabled persons and is a "tester" for the purpose of asserting his civil rights. As such, she monitors mobile websites to ensure and determine whether places of public accommodation and/or their mobile websites comply with the ADA.

6. Defendant, Vima Beach, LLC., is a Florida Limited Liability Company, authorized to and doing business in the state of Florida, which owns and operates a beachside restaurant branded "Café del Mar", a place of public accommodation. Defendant's restaurant is located at 101 S Fort Lauderdale Beach Blvd, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33316, and open to the public. As such, it is a Place of Public Accommodation subject to the requirements of Title III of the ADA and its implementing regulation as defined by 42 U.S.C. §12181(7)(B), §12182, and 28 C.F.R. §36.104(2). Defendant's restaurant is also referenced as "place of public accommodation", "Café del Mar" or "Restaurant."

7. Defendant is defined as a "Public Accommodation" within meaning of Title III because Defendant is a private entity which owns and/or operates "[A] restaurant, bar, or other

Lucius v. Vima Beach
Complaint for Injunctive Relief

establishment serving food or drink” and as “a place of entertainment” pursuant to §§12181(7)(B) &(C), §12182, and 28 C.F.R. §§36.104(2) & (3).

8. After the effective date of the ADA, Defendant constructed, or caused to be constructed, and/or became a beneficiary of the website <https://cafedelmarfl.com> (hereinafter “mobile website”), which is designed for the public to access on their mobile devices (phones, tablets). This mobile website supports, is an extension of, is along with, is complementary and supplemental to Defendant’s public accommodation. The mobile website provides information about Defendant’s public accommodation, including specials, goods, services, accommodations, privileges, benefits and facilities available to patrons at the restaurant’s physical location.

9. The mobile website is offered by Defendants as a way for the public to become familiar with “Café del Mar”, menu selections, hours of operation, restaurant location, and other information Defendant seeks to communicate to the public. Through the mobile the public can make a reservation for dining within the restaurant, as well as contact the restaurant with any request and/or inquiry. The mobile website also provides a link to “Café del Mar” Instagram page to learn about pop-ups and specials. By the provision of menu selection, reservation services, and ability to contact the restaurant online, the mobile website is integral to the goods and services offered by Defendant. By this nexus, the mobile website is characterized as a Place of Public Accommodation subject to Title III of the ADA¹, 42 U.S.C. § 12181(7)(B) and 28 C.F.R. §

¹ Ensuring Web Accessibility for people with disabilities has become a priority for the Department of Justice. The Department of Justice Civil Rights Division has taken the position that both State and local government websites (Title II) and the websites of private entities that are public accommodations (Title III) are covered by the ADA. On March 18, 2022, the DOJ issued guidance on Web Accessibility, see <https://beta.ada.gov/resources/web-guidance/>. The guidance states that individuals with disabilities should not be denied equal access to information, and inaccessible websites are as excluding as are access barriers to physical locations. DOJ guidance requires that website barriers must be identified, prevented, and removed so that all Title II and Title III entities offer websites that are accessible to people with disabilities.

**Lucius v. Vima Beach
Complaint for Injunctive Relief**

36.104(2) and (5).

10. The mobile website allows mobile device users to use a mobile platform through a connection to Wi-Fi or cellular data so that users can manage their dining choice from their mobile device. Thus, the mobile website is subject to the ADA because it is offered as a tool to promote, advertise and sell products and services from Defendant's restaurant, a place of public accommodation. As a result, the mobile website must interact with the public, and in doing so must comply with the ADA, which means it must not discriminate against individuals with disabilities and may not deny full and equal enjoyment of the goods and services afforded to the public.²

11. Defendant's mobile website does not properly interact with VoiceOver screen reader software technology in a manner that allows Plaintiff (a visually impaired person) to comprehend the mobile website and does not provide other means of accommodation.

12. Like the seeing community, Plaintiff would like the opportunity to use the mobile website to test whether she can comprehend the restaurant menu selections, make a reservation to dine at the restaurant, and/or test for the ability to contact the restaurant online. Yet unless Defendant must eliminate the barriers to Plaintiff's ability to communicate with Defendant through the mobile website, Plaintiff will continue to deny full and equal access to the mobile website and will be deterred from fully using that mobile website.

13. Plaintiff is continuously aware of the violations on the mobile website and knows that it would be a futile gesture to attempt to use that mobile website as long as those violations exist unless she is willing to suffer additional discrimination.

14. Defendant and alike restaurants are fully aware of the need to provide full access

² According to Statista, almost half of web traffic in the United States originated from mobile devices in 2021. Therefore, Defendant knew or should have known that potential customers would be using the mobile version of its website and provided accessibility for blind users.

**Lucius v. Vima Beach
Complaint for Injunctive Relief**

to all visitors to the mobile website as such barriers result in discriminatory and unequal treatment of individuals with disabilities who are visually impaired and result in punishment and isolation of blind and low vision individuals from the rest of society.

15. Plaintiff has no plain, adequate, or complete remedy at law to redress the wrongs alleged here and this action is her only means to secure adequate redress from Defendant's discriminatory practice.

16. Notice to Defendant is not required because Defendant failed to cure the violations. Enforcement of the rights of Plaintiff is right and just pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 2201, 2202.

17. Plaintiff has had to retain the civil rights law office of J. Courtney Cunningham, PLLC and has agreed to pay a reasonable fee for services in the prosecution of this cause, including costs and expenses incurred. Plaintiff can recover those attorney's fees, costs and expenses from Defendant under 42 U.S.C. §12205 and 28 C.F.R. 36.505.

COUNT I – VIOLATIONS OF TITLE III OF THE ADA

18. The ADA requires that Public Accommodations (and Places of Public Accommodation) are required to ensure that communication is effective, which includes the provision of auxiliary aids and services for such purpose.

19. According to 28 C.F.R. Section 36.303(b)(1), auxiliary aids and services includes "voice, text, and video-based telecommunications products and systems." 28 C.F.R. Section 36.303(b)(2) specifically states that (VoiceOver) screen reader software is an effective method of making visually delivered material available to individuals who are blind or have low vision.

20. 28 C.F.R. Section 36.303(c)(1)(ii) specifically states that public accommodations must furnish appropriate auxiliary aids and services where necessary to ensure effective communication with individuals with disabilities. "In order to be effective, auxiliary aids and

**Lucius v. Vima Beach
Complaint for Injunctive Relief**

services must be provided in accessible formats, in a timely manner, and in such a way as to protect the privacy and independence of the individual with a disability.”

21. Part 36 of Title 28 of the C.F.R. was designed and is implemented to carry out subtitle A of Title III of the ADA, which requires places of public accommodation to be designed, constructed, and altered in compliance with the accessibility standards established by Part 36.

22. The mobile website has been designed to integrate with “Café del Mar” through the provision of menus, the ability to make a reservation online. Defendant has extended “Café del Mar” restaurant into individual persons' homes and portable devices wherever located through the mobile website which is a service, facility, privilege, advantage, benefit and accommodation of its restaurant. Because the mobile website is integrated with, and is a nexus to, Defendant’s brick-and-mortar restaurant, it is governed by the following provisions:

a. U.S.C. Section 12182(a) provides: “No individual shall be discriminated against on the basis of disability in the full and equal enjoyment of the goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages, or accommodations of any place of public accommodation by any person who owns, leases (or leases to), or operates a place of public accommodation.”

b. 42 U.S.C. Section 12182(b)(1)(A)(i) provides: “It shall be discriminatory to subject an individual or class of individuals on the basis of a disability or disabilities of such individual or class, directly, or through contractual, licensing, or other arrangements, to a denial of the opportunity of the individual or class to participate in or benefit from the goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages, or accommodations of an entity[.]”

c. 42 U.S.C. Section 12182(b)(1)(A)(ii) provides: “It shall be discriminatory to afford an individual or class of individuals, on the basis of a disability or disabilities of such individual or class, directly, or through contractual, licensing, or other arrangements with the

**Lucius v. Vima Beach
Complaint for Injunctive Relief**

opportunity to participate in or benefit from a good, service, facility, privilege, advantage, or accommodation that is not equal to that afforded to other individuals[.]”

d. 42 U.S.C. Section 12182(b)(1)(A)(ii) provides: “It shall be discriminatory to provide an individual or class of individuals, on the basis of a disability or disabilities of such individual or class, directly, or through contractual, licensing, or other arrangements with a good, service, facility, privilege, advantage, or accommodation that is different or separate from that provided to other individuals, unless such action is necessary to provide the individual or class of individuals with a good, service, facility, privilege, advantage, or accommodation, or other opportunity that is as effective as that provided to others[.]”

e. 42 U.S.C. Section 12182(b)(1)(B) provides: “Goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages, and accommodations shall be afforded to an individual with a disability in the most integrated setting appropriate to the needs of the individual.”

f. 42 U.S.C. Section 12182(b)(1)(C) provides: “Notwithstanding the existence of separate or different programs or activities provided in accordance with this section, an individual with a disability shall not be denied the opportunity to participate in such programs or activities that are not separate or different.”

g. 42 U.S.C. Section 12182(b)(2)(ii) describes as discrimination: “a failure to make reasonable modifications in policies, practices, or procedures, when such modifications are necessary to afford such goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages, or accommodations to individuals with disabilities, unless the entity can demonstrate that making such modifications would fundamentally alter the nature of such goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages, or accommodations[.]”

**Lucius v. Vima Beach
Complaint for Injunctive Relief**

h. 42 U.S.C. Section 12182(b)(2)(iii) describes as discrimination: “a failure to take such steps as may be necessary to ensure that no individual with a disability is excluded, denied services, segregated or otherwise treated differently than other individuals because of the absence of auxiliary aids and services, unless the entity can demonstrate that taking such steps would fundamentally alter the nature of the good, service, facility, privilege, advantage, or accommodation being offered or would result in an undue burden[.]”

23. Plaintiff attempted to access and test the mobile website but could not do so because the mobile website contains barriers to effective communication for visually impaired individuals such as herself. Plaintiff is still unable to effectively communicate with Defendant through the mobile website and understand the content therein because many portions of the mobile website do not interface with mobile VoiceOver screen reader software. Features of the mobile website that are inaccessible to Plaintiff (a VoiceOver screen reader software user) include, but are not limited to, the following (citing the WCAG 2.1 Level A and AA Guidelines):

- i Guideline 1.1.1 – Non-Text Content. The Breakfast menu is two pages long, but ten unlabeled images are announced which makes navigation and comprehension more difficult. Users cannot tell what they're missing, they'll only be aware that ten unlabeled images are present.
- ii Guideline 1.3.2 – Meaningful Sequence. When focus first moves to the Café Del Mar 'Lunch & Dinner' menu, then all of the content on page one receives focus and only "image" is announced. After which, we found that focus skips randomly to different sections of the menu which makes it impossible to understand what is being announced. As an example, after just the word 'Ciabatta' the Pasta column was announced then focus skipped to Column one and the 'Add on' description for Salads were announced. With the next swipe, focus skipped across the page to column 4 and just the word "dough" was announced. Mobile SRUs will not be aware that focus is skipping randomly. In this case, they will hear that Ciabatta is available with add ons such as 'Salmon' and 'Dough.'
- iii Guideline 2.4.4 – Link Purpose (In Context). After the unlabeled and improperly formatted phone number is announced, then focus moves to the 'mail' icon in front of the email address and only "link" is announced. After this is announced, then focus moves down to the logo. The email address is not announced, so users just hear an unlabeled link and there's no indication that this is used for reservations.

**Lucius v. Vima Beach
Complaint for Injunctive Relief**

- iv Guideline 3.3.1 – Error Identification. After submitting an incomplete 'Make Reservation' form, an error was indicated but not announced. As shown in the screen capture, the 'Last Name' field turned red to indicate an issue, but we did not hear that the form was processed or that an error was present. We did not hear any announcement until we swiped from the button, and then focus moved down the page instead of to the field with an error.
- v Guideline 3.3.2 – Labels or Instructions. In some cases, we found that an element received focus, but was not labeled and an announcement was not made at all. For example, the first element on this website that receives focus is the 'phone' icon. Although it shows focus, it is not announced. As shown in the screen capture, focus was on the phone icon, but no announcement was made and the 'Share button' which was the previously announced item, remained visible in the speech viewer window.
- vi Guideline 4.1.2 – Name, Role, Value. The menu button, shown in a collapsed state, does receive focus and does expand when tabbed, however, it's not announced with a label or a role. Instead, it is announced as "end banner" so users cannot tell that this is an interactive element which must be tabbed in order to access the navigation menu. This menu is only available via this button, a second option is not available, so users have to use this button in order to access many of the additional pages.

24. The fact that a portion of the WCAG 2.1 Level A and AA Guideline violations may relate to the third-party vendor's reservation platform does not absolve Defendant of culpability. Because restaurants are places of public accommodation, their operators are subject to the requirements of Title III as well. 42 U.S.C. § 12181(7)(b). Those requirements include a prohibition against subjecting patrons with disabilities to discrimination "through contractual, licensing, or other arrangements," such as use of third-party vendors' inaccessible platforms for making reservations. 42 U.S.C. § 12182(b)(1)(A); See *Kohler v Bed Bath & Beyond of Cal., LLC*, 780 F.3d 1260, 1264-66 (9th Cir. 2015) (Pre-existing obligations under Title III of the ADA may not be avoided through contractual arrangements, and those obligations remain even where compliance is under control of another party); *Robles v. Yum! Brands, Inc.*, 2018 WL 566781, *4 (C.D. Cal. January 24, 2018) (restaurant operators are liable for website and mobile app accessibility where there is a nexus to the restaurants themselves).

25. As the owner and/or operator and/or beneficiary of a mobile website which serves

Lucius v. Vima Beach
Complaint for Injunctive Relief

as a gateway to Defendant's restaurant. Defendant is required to comply with the ADA and the provisions cited above. This includes Defendant's obligation to create, maintain and operate a mobile website that is accessible to Plaintiff so that she (as a visually impaired person) can enjoy full and equal access to the mobile website and the content therein, including the ability comprehend menu selections and to test for her ability to make a reservation to dine at the restaurant online.

26. Defendant has violated the ADA by failing to interface the mobile website which is directly linked to its restaurant with VoiceOver screen reader software used by Plaintiff (a visually impaired individual) (reference violations delineated within paragraph 23) either directly or through contractual, licensing, or other arrangements. Defendant's violations have resulted in Defendant denying Plaintiff effective communication on the basis of his disability in accordance with 28 C.F.R. Section 36.303 *et seq*:

a. by depriving Plaintiff of the full and equal enjoyment of the goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages, or accommodations of its place of public accommodation (42 U.S.C. § 12182(a));

b. in the denial of providing Plaintiff the opportunity to participate in or benefit from the goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages, or accommodations (42 U.S.C. § 12182(b)(1)(A)(i));

c. in failing to afford Plaintiff the opportunity to participate in or benefit from a good, service, facility, privilege, advantage, or accommodation that is equal to that afforded to other individuals (42 U.S.C. § 12182(b)(1)(A)(ii));

d. by providing Plaintiff a good, service, facility, privilege, advantage, or accommodation that is different or separate from that provided to other individuals (unless such

**Lucius v. Vima Beach
Complaint for Injunctive Relief**

action is necessary to provide the individual or class of individuals with a good, service, facility, privilege, advantage, or accommodation, or other opportunity that is as effective as that provided to others) (42 U.S.C. § 12182(b)(1)(A)(iii));

e. by failing to afford Plaintiff goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages, and accommodations in the most integrated setting appropriate to the needs of the disabled individual (42 U.S.C. § 12182(b)(1)(B));

f. notwithstanding the existence of separate or different programs or activities provided in accordance with this section, by denying Plaintiff the opportunity to participate in such programs or activities that are not separate or different. (42 U.S.C. § 12182(b)(1)(C));

g. by a failure to make reasonable modifications in policies, practices, or procedures, when such modifications are necessary to afford such goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages, or accommodations to individuals with disabilities (unless the entity can demonstrate that making such modifications would fundamentally alter the nature of such goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages, or accommodations) (42 U.S.C. § 12182(b)(2)(ii)); and,

h. by a failure to take such steps as necessary to ensure that disabled individuals are not excluded, denied services, segregated or otherwise treated differently than other individuals because of the absence of auxiliary aids and services (unless the entity can demonstrate that taking such steps would fundamentally alter the nature of the good, service, facility, privilege, advantage, or accommodation being offered or would result in an undue burden) (42 U.S.C. § 12182(b)(2)(iii)).

27. Plaintiff is continuously aware of the violations within the mobile website and knows that it would be a futile gesture to attempt to use and/or test the mobile website as long as those violations exist.

**Lucius v. Vima Beach
Complaint for Injunctive Relief**

28. As the result of the barriers to communication which are present within the mobile website and by continuing to operate and/or benefit from the mobile website with such barriers, Defendant has contributed to Plaintiff's frustration, humiliation, sense of isolation and segregation and has deprived Plaintiff the full and equal enjoyment of the goods, services, facilities, privileges and/or accommodations available to the public. By encountering the barriers to effective communication within the mobile website and knowing that it would be a futile gesture to attempt to use the mobile website, Plaintiff has been deprived of the meaningful choice of using the same services of a public accommodation which are readily available to the public and has been deterred and discouraged from doing so. By benefiting from and/or maintaining a mobile website with barriers to effective communication, Defendant has deprived Plaintiff the equality of opportunity which it offers to the public.

29. Plaintiff has suffered (and will continue to suffer) direct and indirect injury as a result of Defendant's violations until Defendant is compelled to comply with the ADA and conform the mobile website to WCAG 2.1 Level A and AA Guidelines.

30. Plaintiff has a realistic, credible, existing, and continuing threat of discrimination from Defendant's non-compliance with the ADA with respect to its mobile website. Plaintiff has reasonable grounds to believe that she will continue to face discrimination in violation of the ADA by Defendant when she visits the mobile website to test for compliance with the ADA. Plaintiff desires to access the mobile website to avail herself of the benefits, advantages, goods and services therein, and/or to assure herself that the mobile website is in compliance with the ADA so that she and others similarly situated will have full and equal enjoyment of the mobile website without fear of discrimination.

31. Plaintiff is without adequate remedy at law and is suffering irreparable harm.

**Lucius v. Vima Beach
Complaint for Injunctive Relief**

Plaintiff has retained the undersigned counsel and is entitled to recover attorney's fees, costs and litigation expenses from the Defendant under 42 U.S.C. § 12205 and 28 CFR 36.505.

32. Plaintiff and all others similarly situated will continue to suffer such discrimination, injury and damage without the immediate relief provided by the ADA as requested herein.

33. Under 42 U.S.C. § 12188, this Court is provided with authority to grant Plaintiff Injunctive Relief, including an order to require Defendant to alter the mobile website to make it readily accessible to and usable by Plaintiff (a visually impaired person).

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff, Windy Lucius demands judgment against Defendant, Vima Beach, LLC, d/b/a Café del Mar and requests the following injunctive and declaratory relief:

- a. The Court issue a Declaratory Judgment that determines that Defendant's mobile website is in violation of Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act, 42 U.S.C. § 12181 et seq.;
- b. The Court issue a Declaratory Judgment that Defendant has violated the ADA by failing to monitor and maintain the mobile website which serves as a gateway to its restaurant to ensure that it is readily accessible to and usable by persons with vision impairment;
- c. The Court issue an Order directing Defendant to alter its mobile website to make it accessible to, and useable by, individuals with disabilities to the full extent required by Title III of the ADA;
- d. The Court issue an Order directing Defendant provide the appropriate auxiliary aids such that individuals with visual impairments will be able to effectively communicate with the mobile website, and designed to permit individuals with visual impairments to effectively communicate, requiring Defendant to provide an alternative method for

**Lucius v. Vima Beach
Complaint for Injunctive Relief**

- individuals with visual impairments to effectively communicate so that disabled individuals are not impeded from obtaining the goods and services made available to the public through Defendant's mobile website.
- e. The Court enter an Order directing Defendant to evaluate and neutralize its policies and procedures towards persons with disabilities for such reasonable time so as to allow Defendant to undertake and complete corrective procedures;
 - f. The Court enter an Order directing Defendant to continually update and maintain its mobile website to ensure that it remains fully accessible to and usable by visually impaired individuals;
 - g. The Court award attorney's fees, costs and litigation expenses under 42 U.S.C. § 12205; and,
 - h. The Court provide such other relief as the Court deems just and proper, and/or is allowable under Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Respectfully submitted this August 9, 2024.

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